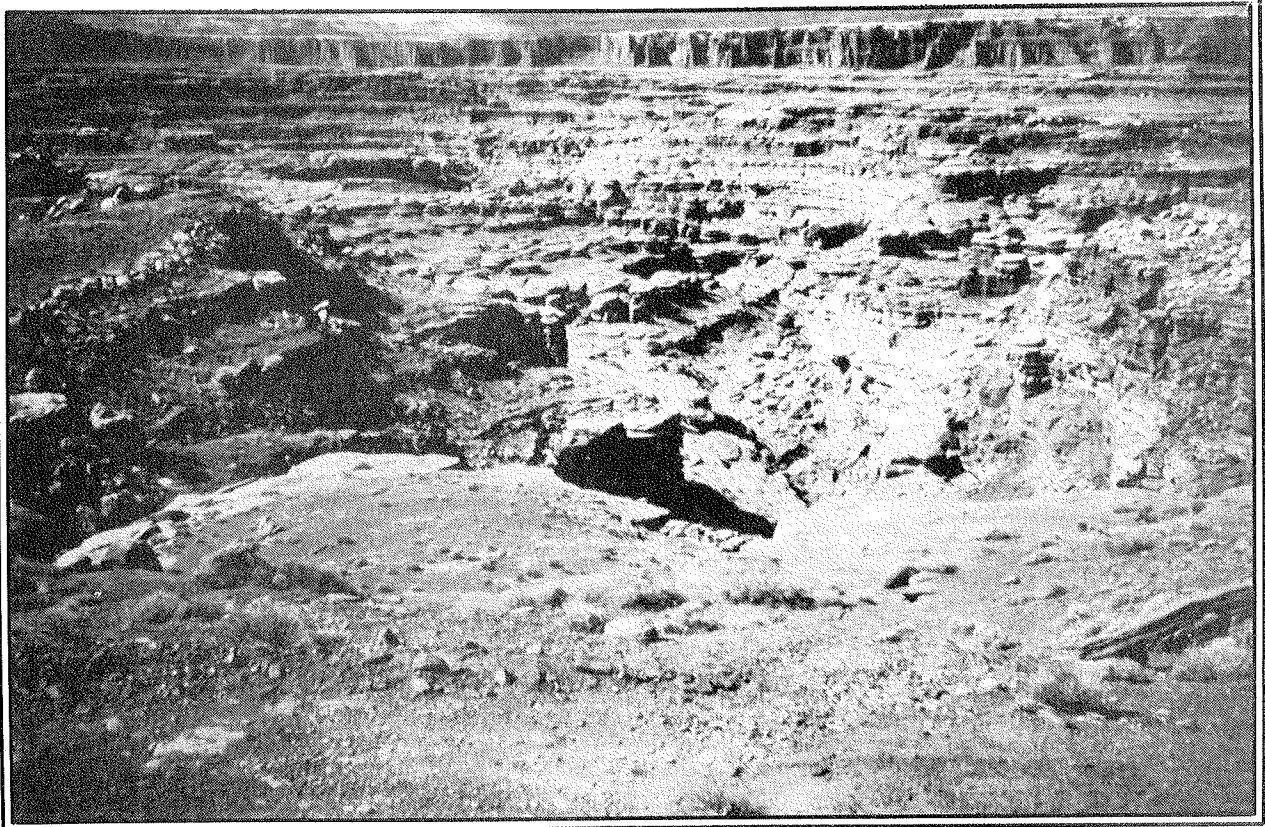








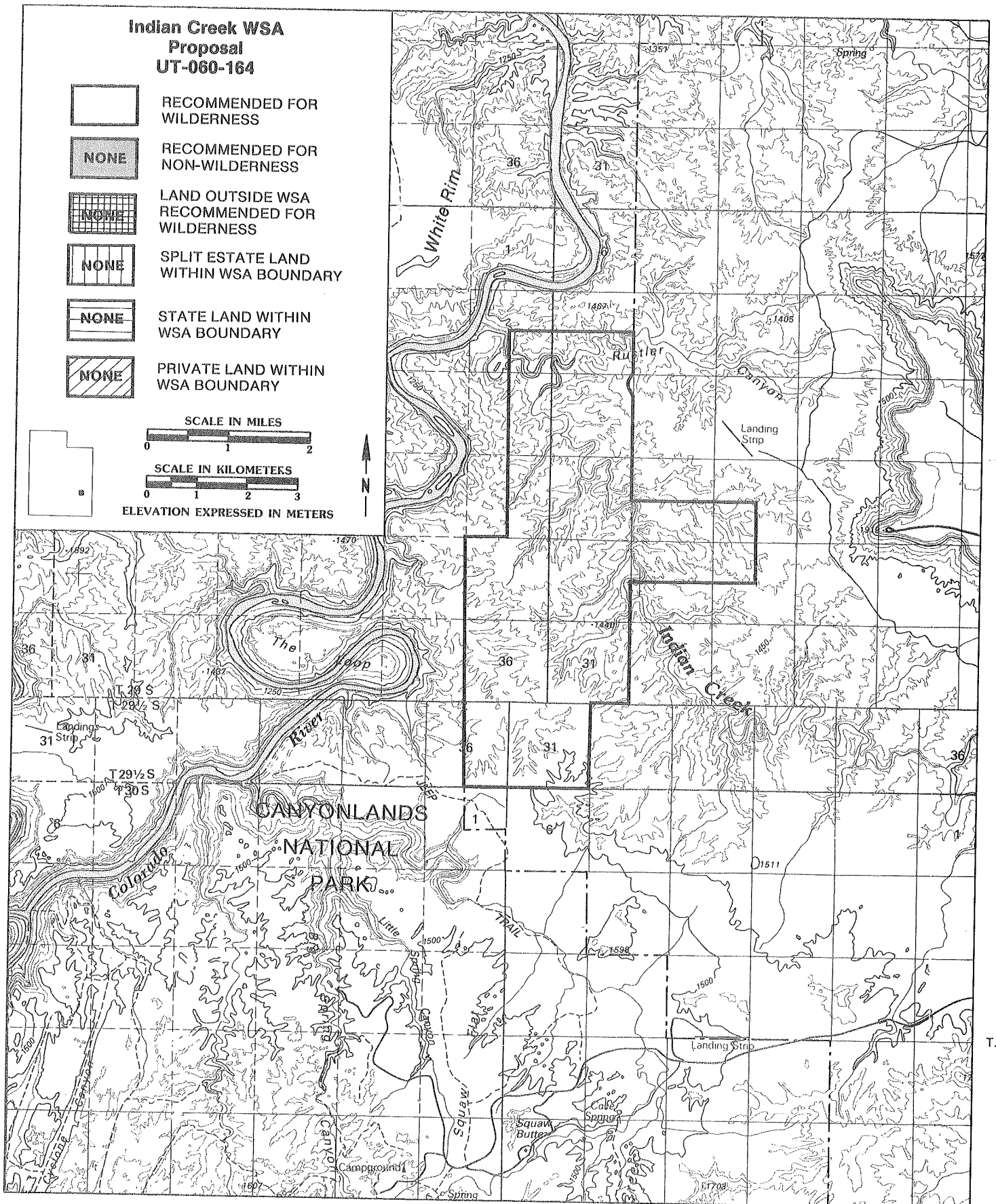
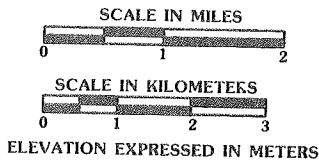
# Indian Creek WSA



# INDIAN CREEK WSA

## Indian Creek WSA Proposal UT-060-164

-  RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  NONE RECOMMENDED FOR NON-WILDERNESS
-  NONE LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS
-  NONE SPLIT ESTATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  NONE STATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY
-  NONE PRIVATE LAND WITHIN WSA BOUNDARY



R. 19 E.

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October 1991

# **INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA**

## **1. THE STUDY AREA: 6,870 acres**

The Indian Creek Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (UT-060-164) is in San Juan County, about 35 miles northwest of Monticello, Utah (population 1,929). The study area is about 5.5 miles long from north to south and 1.5 to 3.5 miles wide from east to west. Canyonlands National Park is adjacent to the WSA on the north and west. The boundary of the WSA on the east and south is along section and subsection lines (see Map). The WSA contains 6,870 acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

There are no private, State, or split-estate land in-holdings in the WSA (see Table 1). The WSA is in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau Physiographic Province.

The study area consists of several northward-sloping canyons as much as 300 feet deep and narrow, twisting tributary canyons, cut through red rock. Four miles of perennial streams are within the WSA. Elevations range from 4,000 feet to 4,800 feet. About 75 percent (5,163 acres) of the WSA is bare rock. Sparse desert shrub covers the remainder of the study area. The climate is arid, with hot summers and cold winters.

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and was included in the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) finalized in November 1990. Two alternatives were analyzed in the EIS: an all wilderness alternative, which is the recommendation of this report, and a no wilderness (no action) alternative.

**TABLE 1  
LAND STATUS AND ACREAGE SUMMARY IN THE STUDY AREA**

<b>WITHIN THE WSA</b>	<b>ACRES</b>
BLM (surface and subsurface)	6,870
Split-Estate (BLM surface only)	0
In-holdings (State, Private)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,870</b>
<b>WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS BOUNDARY</b>	
BLM (within the WSA)	6,870
BLM (outside the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (within the WSA)	0
Split-Estate (outside the WSA)	0
<b>Total BLM land recommended for wilderness</b>	<b>6,870</b>
In-holdings (State, private)	
<b>WITHIN THE AREA NOT RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS</b>	
BLM	0
Split-Estate	0
<b>Total BLM land not recommended for wilderness</b>	<b>0</b>
In-holdings (State, Private)	0

Source: BLM File Data

## INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Subsequent to publication of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS, the Utah State Director approved the San Juan Resource Area Resource Management Plan (RMP).

The plan includes approximately 5,470 acres of the Indian Creek WSA was included within the Indian Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) to maintain scenic quality.

The special management requirements now in effect within the ACEC, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: stipulations to prevent surface occupancy on oil and gas leases (Category 3); requirement for an approved plan of operations with special conditions to limit surface use for mining related activity; closure to disposal of mineral materials; exclusion from private and commercial use of woodland products, except for limited on-site collection of dead wood for campfires; closed to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use; management to limit recreation use if scenic values are being damaged; management to meet Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class I objectives.

Approximately 1,400 acres of the WSA are outside of the Indian Creek ACEC. This area is classified as semi-primitive non-motorized (SPNM class) under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classification system, and is managed to provide a predominantly natural environment with limited evidence of human use and, where possible, to provide an environment with some opportunity for isolation. Special management requirements now in effect in SPNM class areas in Indian Creek WSA, where consistent with valid existing rights, include: mineral leasing, geophysical work and disposal of mineral materials with special conditions to limit surface use (Category 2); construction of range improvements and new land treatments so long as they blend with the natural character of the land; limitation of OHV use to designated roads and trails; construction of development projects that blend with the natural character of the landscape; private and commercial use of woodland products; management to meet VRM Class II objectives.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE:

6,870 acres  
(recommended for wilderness)  
0 acres  
(not recommended for wilderness)

The recommendation for this WSA is to designate the entire area as wilderness. This is the environmentally preferable alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term.

All of the area is in a natural state and has outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Potash and uranium or vanadium may be present in the WSA, but the likelihood of extraction is low. No conflicts with other land uses exist. Designation is complementary to proposed wilderness in adjacent Canyonlands National Park.

Approximately 5,470 acres of the WSA are in the Indian Creek ACEC where restrictions on OHV use, mineral and energy exploration and production, mineral material disposal, and woodland harvest would continue to be administratively applied if protection of wilderness characteristics is not a management objective.

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATION

#### Wilderness Characteristics

##### A. Naturalness

Naturalness is defined as an attribute in which the evidence of man is substantially unnoticeable to the average visitor and where minor imprints of man exhibit no cumulative impact that is substantially noticeable. Overall, imprints cover less than 1 percent of the WSA and are substantially unnoticeable in the area as a whole. The rugged slickrock landscape characterizes the naturalness of the area. The entire WSA (6,870 acres) meets the naturalness criteria for areas under wilderness review.

The WSA is in a natural condition partly due to its inaccessibility. Most human activity is associated with cattle grazing. A gap fence was erected a 0.25 mile above the mouth of Rustler Canyon to prevent cattle from drifting into Indian Creek. The fence is approximately 30

## INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

yards long from rim to rim of the canyon and has four strands of barbed wire and four steel posts. The fence is located in tamarisk and has an insignificant visual impact.

On the point to the west of the Rustler Canyon pour-off are the scattered remains of a missile launched from the Green River Missile Range in the 1960s. The larger portions of the missile were salvaged. A few sections of metal 2- to 3-feet long from 1- to 2-feet wide remain. Most of the scraps are less than 6 inches long. All of the pieces remaining have oxidized and now blend into the surrounding environment.

Annual assessment work of mining claims is evident along less than 1 mile of vehicular way near the northeast boundary of the WSA. The disturbance within the WSA is not significant.

No surface-disturbing activities have occurred since the wilderness inventory.

### B. Solitude

The entire WSA (6,870 acres) meets the criteria for outstanding opportunities for solitude.

More than 10 miles of entrenched meandering canyons are within the WSA, including Indian Creek, Rustler Canyon, and their tributaries. The divides between canyons display several visual zones and enhance the opportunities for solitude. The vegetation of the WSA does not provide screening due to its limited extent.

Most of the unit is isolated from off-site intrusions and influences. Occasional off-highway vehicular (OHV) use northeast of the WSA is a nuisance, but it does not significantly affect opportunities for solitude.

### C. Primitive and Unconfined Recreation

The WSA meets the criteria for primitive and unconfined recreation on all 6,870 acres. The steep, narrow canyon of Indian Creek provides outstanding opportunities for backpacking and associated activities.

### D. Special Features

Twelve archaeological sites have been recorded in the WSA and the area may contain many more pristine cultural resources that have not been recorded.

Two pour-offs in Indian Creek near the western border of the WSA are picturesque when water is flowing in the intermittent drainage. The two pour-offs drop almost 150 feet.

Evidence of desert bighorn sheep, which is a wildlife species associated with wilderness, has been found within this WSA. Peregrine falcons, an endangered species may occur in the WSA. Six other animal species and one plant species that are considered sensitive may occur in the WSA.

Refer to Appendix 4 and the Affected Environment, Vegetation and Wildlife Including Special Status Species sections of the Utah BLM Statewide Wilderness Final EIS for additional information. The entire WSA is rated outstanding for scenic quality.

### Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

#### A. Expanding the Diversity of Natural Systems and Features as Represented by Ecosystems

Wilderness designation of this WSA would add a potential natural vegetation (PNV) ecosystem not presently represented in the NWPS.

PNV is the vegetative type that would eventually become climax vegetation if not altered by human interference, and is not necessarily the vegetation that is currently present in an area.

The WSA is in the Colorado Plateau Province/Ecoregion. The PNV in the WSA is entirely blackbrush (6,870 acres).

The PNV in the WSA is not represented in the NWPS nationally or in Utah, nor is it represented in other BLM study areas outside of Utah.

This information is summarized in Table 2 from data compiled in December 1989.

# INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

TABLE 2  
ECOSYSTEM REPRESENTATION

BAILEY-KUCHLER CLASSIFICATION (PNV)	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
NATIONWIDE (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	223,194
UTAH (COLORADO PLATEAU PROVINCE)				
Blackbrush	0	0	11	223,194

Source: BLM File Data.

TABLE 3  
WILDERNESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESIDENTS OF MAJOR POPULATION CENTERS

POPULATION CENTERS	NWPS AREAS		OTHER BLM STUDIES	
	AREAS	ACRES	AREAS	ACRES
Provo-Orem, Utah	11	721,793	90	2,779,998

Source: BLM File Data.

## B. Assessing the Opportunities for Solitude or Primitive Recreation within a Days Driving Time (5 Hours) of Major Population Centers

The WSA is within a 5-hour drive of Provo-Orem, Utah. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated wilderness and other BLM study areas within a 5-hour drive of this population center.

## C. Balancing the Geographic Distribution of Wilderness Areas

The Indian Creek WSA would not contribute significantly to balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas within the NWPS. As of January 1987, the NWPS included 44 areas comprising 3,143,330 acres in Utah and Colorado, the adjacent state nearest the WSA.

An Indian Creek Wilderness would supplement the NWPS in the Canyonlands Section of the Colorado Plateau, however, where there are just two established wilderness areas, totaling 70,751 acres. There are five designated wilderness areas within 100 miles of the WSA.

Approximately 22 miles south of the WSA is the 45,000-acre Dark Canyon Wilderness (U.S. Forest Service [FS]), and to the east, in Colorado, are the 16,505-acre Mt. Sneffels (FS), the 41,189-acre Lizard Head Wilderness (FS), the 8,100-acre Mesa Verde (National Park Service [NPS]) and the 11,180-acre Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness (NPS).

Manageability (The area must be capable of being effectively managed to preserve its wilderness character.)

The WSA could be managed as wilderness. No development is projected in the WSA prior to or following designation. There are no private, State, or split-estate lands in the WSA. There are no existing oil and gas leases. There is one pending oil and gas lease (839 acres) in the WSA; however, the potential for oil and gas development is low. There are no mining claims in the Indian Creek WSA. Several small deposits of uranium have been mined near the northern and eastern boundaries of the WSA; however, the potential for uranium deposits is only low to moderate in the WSA.



## INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

Domestic livestock grazing and maintenance of a fence for livestock control in Rustler Canyon would continue as authorized. This would not significantly detract from wilderness values in the area.

Increased ORV use in other parts of the Indian Creek drainage may infringe on the WSA and would be administratively difficult to control.

### Energy and Mineral Resource Values

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the U.S. Bureau of Mines (USBM) prepared a mineral assessment report for the Indian Creek WSA (USGS Bulletin 1754-A, Charles G. Patterson, et al., 1989). The report indicated that inferred subeconomic resources of sandstone and sand and gravel exist, but because of their abundance throughout the region, their distance from current markets, and their lack of unique properties, these materials have no current likelihood of development. Inferred subeconomic resources of potash and halite (rock salt) are present beneath the WSA, but the likelihood of their development is low.

The resource potential for undiscovered geothermal energy, coal, and metals other than uranium, vanadium, and copper is also low. The resource potential for a rare earth mineral (braitschite) that is present elsewhere in the region is unknown.

No mining activity has occurred in the WSA, although some prospect pits are on the eastern boundary of the WSA.

The resource potential for undiscovered oil and gas is moderate. Hydrocarbon-bearing formations and structural traps exist at depth, but drilling in adjacent areas has not resulted in any production. The resource potential for undiscovered geothermal energy and coal is also low. No evidence or reports of geothermal energy in the region of the WSA have been found. No coal-bearing formations are present in the WSA.

The potential for undiscovered resources of uranium and byproducts, vanadium, and copper is high in the northeastern portion of the WSA. This assessment is based upon the presence of mineralized

rock and a geologic environment favorable for uranium occurrence. The resource potential for undiscovered uranium, vanadium, and copper is low in the southern part of the WSA, based on the absence of any indications of mineralization. Overall, BLM has identified a low to moderate potential for uranium in the WSA.

### Impacts on Resources

The comparative impact table (Table 4) summarizes the effects on wilderness values which is considered to be the only pertinent resource that would be significantly affected by designation or nondesignation of the area as wilderness.

### Local Social and Economic Considerations

Social and economic factors were not considered to be significant issues in the EIS.

### Summary of WSA-Specific Comments

Public involvement has occurred throughout the wilderness review process. Comments received during the early stages of the EIS preparation were used to develop significant study issues and alternatives for the ultimate management of the WSA.

During formal public review of the Draft EIS, a total of 160 inputs specifically addressing this WSA were received from 187 commenters, including oral statements received at 17 public hearings on the EIS. Each letter or oral testimony was considered to be one input. Duplicate letters or oral statements by the same commenter were not counted as additional inputs or signatures. Each individual was credited with one signature or testimony regardless of the number of inputs. In general, 160 commenters supported wilderness designation for part or all of the WSA, while 21 commenters were opposed. Six commenters addressed the relative merits of the EIS but took no formal position on wilderness designation.

Those favoring wilderness commented on the wilderness values, special features, and primitive recreation opportunities. The majority of those commenting were

## INDIAN CREEK WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

from other states. Of particular concern was the need to protect wilderness values and complement proposed wilderness in adjacent Canyonlands National Park.

Those opposing wilderness were concerned that wilderness would preclude mineral-related activities and doubted that there is a need for more wilderness. Those opposing wilderness designation were almost equally from rural and urban Utah and from other states.

Three Federal agencies, the NPS, the USBM, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), commented on the Draft EIS for the WSA. The NPS supported the all wilderness alternative because the area is contiguous with and complements proposed wilderness in Canyonlands National Park. The NPS commented that the Indian Creek unit should include Horse Thief Canyon and the upper portions of the Indian Creek drainage which meet the criteria for wilderness. NPS provided the legal descriptions of more than 10,000 additional acres and proposed that this acreage be added to the proposed wilderness area.

The USBM did not take a position regarding designation of the WSA, but commented that BLM underrated the oil and gas potential in the WSA.

The EPA did not take a position regarding designation of the WSA. The EPA commented that several WSAs near Canyonlands National Park, including Indian Creek WSA, should be under similar management or grouped together to form a larger geographical area in order to improve integrated multiple resource planning.

No comment letters were received on the Final EIS.

There are no State sections in the WSA. In commenting on the Draft EIS, the State of Utah expressed general opposition to wilderness designation but did not take a definite position regarding designation of the WSA. The State commented that Indian Creek WSA has moderate wilderness values and moderate conflicts. The State added that there is some potential for potash, uranium/vanadium, and groundwater development in the

WSA; however, the probability of large scale, economic deposits of uranium is low.

The Indian Creek WSA is in San Juan County. The San Juan County Master Plan emphasizes multiple use of public lands and zones the WSA as open range and forest land. The San Juan County Commission is opposed to wilderness designation for the Indian Creek WSA and has endorsed the Consolidated Local Government Response to Wilderness that opposes wilderness designation of BLM lands in Utah. In commenting on the Draft EIS the Commission noted that designation of the WSA as wilderness would be in conflict with the County Master Plan. The Commission commented that the proximity of the WSA to the Lockhart road compromises the sense of isolation and solitude and that the WSA is geologically and ecologically identical to other areas already protected in the GCNRA, National Parks, National Monuments, and FS wilderness within the Colorado Plateau and in San Juan County.



## INDIAN CREEK WSA

**Table 4**  
**Comparative Summary of Impacts by Alternative<sup>a</sup>**

Alternatives		
Issue Topic	Recommendation All Wilderness (6,870 Acres)	No Action/No Wilderness
Impacts on Wilderness Values	Wilderness designation would preserve the wilderness values in the WSA. This alternative would complement and enhance wilderness uses, values, and management of the contiguous National Park Service lands proposed for wilderness designation by the NPS.	Wilderness values would not be protected by wilderness designation. No disturbance is anticipated in the foreseeable future that would affect wilderness values. Vehicular use of less than 1 mile of way would occasionally detract from opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. This alternative would not complement or enhance wilderness values, uses, and management of contiguous lands proposed for wilderness designation by the NPS.